

Palm/Passion Sunday

Please note: **Bolded sections** to be read by congregation.

* (invitation to stand as you are able)

WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Organ Prelude

READING: Matthew 21:1-11

*PALM PARADE/HYMN #123 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

LIGHTING THE CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP

We join the roadside crowds to welcome Jesus

HOSANNA! Praise to the King!

We gather in amazement at the promise of new hope

HOSANNA! Praise to the God of hope!

We watch as Jesus lives out the last week of his life

and still we cry HOSANNA! Praise to God!

OPENING PRAYER

VU #125

LORD'S PRAYER (spoken)

CHOIR

TIME WITH THE CHILDREN

*HYMN: #357 Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Through his death Jesus showed us the power of love.

Through the Cross God shows us that one person can change the world.

Through our Easter hope we are revitalised to change the world.

HOSANNA! Praise to the God of Cross and Tomb!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, by the Cross of Christ you confront us with the need to change our attitudes and actions.

You call us to look at how we have been responsible for the way others are treated.

You challenge our assumptions about the way things have to be.

You encourage us to see the world in a new light.

By your Spirit give us grace to be agents of your love and stewards of your gifts. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

THE STORY (Based on Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-27:66)

HYMN: Were you There?

Were you there when they waved the palms and sang?

Were you there when they waved the palms and sang?

Oh Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble

Were you there when they waved the palms and sang?

Story 1 – The Parade (Matthew 21:1-11)

HYMN: Were you there when they all shared bread and wine?

Story 2 – The Supper (Matthew 26:14-30)

HYMN: Were you there when he knelt and prayed to God?

Story 3 – The Garden (Matthew 26:31-56a)

HYMN: Were you there when his friends all turned and fled?

Story 4 – Peter's Denial (Matthew 26:56b-58, 69-75)

HYMN: Were you there when they sentenced him to death?

Story 5 – The Trial (Matthew 26:59-68; 27:11-31)

HYMN: Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Story 6 – The Cross (Matthew 27:32-55)

HYMN: Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Story 7 – The Tomb (Matthew 27:57-66)

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

MINUTE FOR MISSION

OFFERING: Invitation

Offertory

*Doxology #506 verse 1

**Take my life and let it be
consecrated all for Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise**

*Offering Prayer

**God, we bring our offerings before you,
not just pieces of paper and metal but symbols of
ourselves,
we lay before you our lives,
hoping that you will use them to change the world.
Amen**

SHARING CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS

CALL TO PRAYER (# 400 VU)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*HYMN: #182 Stay With Us

*COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

“Jesus cried again and breathed his last”

And the world shook with power

Now we watch and wait

Waiting for hope to be reborn.

We echo again the words, knowing that God will hear:

Stay with us through the pain, the grief, the dread

God walks with us through the night until the morning

breaks again

AMEN

*CHORAL RESPONSE: (Sung twice)

Go now in peace! Go now in peace!

May the love of God surround you.

Everywhere, everywhere,

You may go.

*THREEFOLD AMEN

POSTLUDE

Sing “Were You There when they waved the palms and sang?”

Story #1 – The Parade

Matthew 21:1-11

(Jewish Merchant, has traveled the Empire.)

I was there. I was born here in Jerusalem but it is many years since I have been back for Passover. I am a merchant by trade and my business takes me all around the Eastern part of the Empire. But this year my journeys have brought me back. As I was coming home from Syria I heard stories of this man, this carpenter’s son, who was doing wonderful things and teaching about God’s Word. As I got close to Jerusalem I could hear people shouting and singing. At first I thought this was just excitement about the coming feast but then I saw that there was a man at the center of all this uproar. He was riding on a donkey with cloaks as a saddle. People had spread their cloaks on the ground and pulled branches off the trees to lay on the road as well, making a carpet of sorts.

As I got closer I could hear that people were crying “Hosanna, to the Son of David!” and “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”. I grabbed the arm of one of the men and asked what was going on. He told me that this was Jesus from Nazareth, the carpenter’s son, who was the promised Messiah. This was the one who would save our people from the Romans.

A chill went through me when I heard this. As a boy I had learned the ancient prophecies of a king like David who would come again. And I shared the hope of every Jew for a new Kingdom of Judah. But as a man I had seen what the Romans did to people who threatened the peace. My heart tells me that this man, Jesus, has not long to live. Rome does not like a challenge.

Sing “Were you there when they all shared bread and wine?”

Story #2 – The Upper Room

Matthew 26:14-30

(Woman who had been at the supper)

I was there. I read that story that Matthew wrote. To hear him talk you would have thought that there were only the 13 of them up there for supper. Far from it. There were many more of us but I guess that Matthew didn't think we were worth mentioning. But the other women and I had walked with Jesus for many days. HE thought we were important. HE showed us that we were beloved Daughters of Abraham. So we wanted to stay with him as long as we could, to feel the love.

That was a strange, almost frightening, meal. Many times I had eaten with Jesus but those meals had always been joyful occasions. Jesus had taught me, taught all of us, how important it was to eat together, how a shared meal showed us that we were all children of God. But that night there was something different about him. Many people in my life have died and often it seems that they know when death is near. That is how Jesus looked that night. His face was drawn, almost painful. Then, out of nowhere he announced that someone in the group would betray him. Someone who had shared food with him would turn him over? None of us could believe it. All of the men denied that they would do such a thing. Jesus just sat there and listened.

Then at the end of the meal he did something I will never forget. He took some of the bread and broke it and gave it to us. He said “Take, eat; this is my body”. Then he took some of the wine and passed it to us and told us to drink it because it was his blood of the new covenant. He went on to talk about the forgiveness of sins and we all shared in the bread and wine. Then he said that he would not eat or drink again until he was in the Father's kingdom.

I tell you my own blood ran cold then. I was sure that he was about to die right then and there. But he didn't. Instead we sang a hymn (one of the Psalms I believe) and went out to the Mount of Olives. I was going to stay and clean up but something told me I needed to stay with Jesus.

Sing “Were you there when he knelt and prayed to God”

Story #3 – The Garden

Matthew 26:31-56

(Bystander who happened to have gone to the Garden for some time alone)

I was there. I am not Jewish so I don't celebrate Passover. But in the middle of the festival there was little else to do so I went out to the Garden by the Mount of Olives to sit and look at the stars. This is something I like to do and think of my home far away, usually I can do it without being disturbed. Imagine my surprise when Jesus and his band came along. I had heard about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and stories about the amazing things he had done so I have to admit I was curious. I hid in the bushes to watch what would happen.

For a man who just days before had been called “King of the Jews” Jesus looked very un-kingly. He said something to his friends about how they would all desert him, he even predicted that one of them – he seemed to be the chief – would deny knowing him 3 times before the cock crew. Jesus looked tired and like he had given up.

While I was thinking about this, Jesus and three of his friends moved some distance away. Still curious, I quietly moved over to where they were. There Jesus started to pray, after asking the other 3 to stay awake and watch with him. I listened carefully to his prayer, wanting to gain some understanding of the Jewish God. It was a prayer of anguish, asking the Father to change something that was about to happen. At the end though, Jesus agreed to let God's will be done. Then he saw that his friends were sleeping. Jesus woke them and chastised them for their weakness. This happened three times and then I heard the sounds of people approaching.

A large crowd showed up, people from the Jewish priests and elders. Well not the priests and elders themselves but some of their followers. One from the crowd came forward and greeted Jesus with a kiss. This must have been a sign for immediately the crowd seized Jesus. One of his friends drew a sword and was ready to fight but Jesus stopped him, saying that if God had not wanted this to happen angels would come to fight. Jesus asked why they arrested him here instead of in the open light of day but there was no answer.

As the crowd hustled Jesus away I stayed behind. I work with the governor's court; I had heard what the priests and elders were planning. Having seen Jesus, and heard his anguish, I did not want to see what would happen next. For all intents and purposes he was already dead. And yet I couldn't help but think that this was someone special. I wish I had met him before now.

Sing “Were you there when his friends all turned and fled?”

Story #4 – Peter’s Denial

Matthew 26:56-58,69-75

(One of the people at the fire with Peter)

I was there. The word had spread like wildfire that Jesus had been arrested. A group of us had gathered in the courtyard to watch what was going to happen. Then, after the crowd passed by, a single man came up alone. For a moment I thought he would follow them but he stopped and turned towards us. Some from our group recognized him and asked if he had been with Jesus. Abruptly and with a little bit of fear in his voice the man swore that he did not know Jesus. It was almost as if he was afraid that he would be arrested next. This happened three times and then the cock crowed to welcome the dawn. The stranger looked towards the sound and gave an anguished wail before running out weeping. As he went I heard him say “my Lord how did you know?”

Sing “Were you there when they sentenced him to death??”

Story #5 – The Trial

Matthew 26:59-68; 27:11-31

(A member of the Council)

I was there. For several weeks we had taken time at meetings of the council to talk about the stories we heard about this man Jesus, the one said to be the Messiah. We were troubled by what we heard. Several religious leaders who had met the man said that while he was a powerful speaker he did not seem to feel bound by instructions from the current leadership. Not only that, but he was teaching that the current system was wrong, that it prevented people from being who God wanted them to be. This was an obvious challenge to our authority.

Then there was that dreadful exhibition on the road in from Bethphage. Did those fools forget about the Roman legions? Did they really think that Rome would stand by peacefully and watch a rebellion begin? All this talk about the “King of the Jews”, and “the one who comes in the name of the Lord”. Absolute rubbish I tell you. Certainly we would know when the Messiah had come. We would be the first to welcome him. Then this so-called Messiah disrupts proper commerce in the Temple! Obviously we had to do something so when one of his followers offered to help us arrest him we jumped at the chance.

I don’t know what Judas thought was going to happen but let me tell you, we were determined that this troublemaker needed to die. If people followed his example the Romans might think we had lost control and then where would we be? Dead is my guess. Surely it was better that this nobody from Galilee die instead. So we had a trial and were able, finally, to convict him of blasphemy. This way the crowd was back on our side – or at least the crowd that was there that night.

Unfortunately, we needed the help of Rome so we took Jesus before Pilate. We made many charges against him so that Pilate would agree to an execution but Jesus just stood there and said nothing. Odd that, I expected that he would at least TRY to defend himself. This seemed to impress Pilate somehow.

Pilate offered to release someone from prison because it was Passover. He suggested it be Jesus but we did not want him around to make more trouble. So we worked the crowd. We got them stirred up and had them demand that Pilate release some man named Barrabbas and execute Jesus. Pilate asked several times but we got the crowd to yell louder and louder. Finally Pilate was convinced and made an attempt to put all the blame back on the crowd and us. But believe me, it was to Pilate’s advantage to get rid of Jesus too.

The Roman soldiers had no problem with the decision – in fact they had a great time mocking the “King of the Jews”, beating him and mocking him before taking him away.

Sing “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

Story #6 – The Crucifixion

Matthew 27:32-56

(Roman Legionary)

I was there. In my years in the legions I have attended more crucifixions than I can count. They are never pleasant things but they do help keep the peace. It is amazing what the sight of a few troublemakers hanging on a cross will do to make other people think twice. But there was something different about this man. When we got to the place of execution it was our custom to offer the condemned a drink formulated to numb their inevitable pain. This was done partly out of mercy but mainly for our own benefit. A drugged man does not fight nearly as much nor scream as much. Those screams always haunted me after a crucifixion. But this man, the one they called Jesus, he refused to take the drink. Well we put him on the cross and raised him up then we sat down to divide his possessions and wait for him to die. As a warning to others who would dare challenge Roman might we put a sign above his head. The centurion read it to us: This is Jesus, King of the Jews”.

While he was hanging there a large crowd gathered. They taunted the man, challenging him to show the power of God since he was supposedly God’s Son. The man ignored them. Then around midday the sky grew very dark and stayed that way for a long time. And still this “King” had not screamed in pain. I was amazed at his composure and courage. Finally, after three hours of darkness he screamed something in his own language. Later one of my Jewish friends said that Jesus had asked why God had abandoned him. So I guess he did feel the pain after all. With another cry his body went limp. He was dead.

That death was an eerie event, and I have seen many men die. The sky, the very earth seemed to shake and roar. We were all very afraid. My centurion muttered something about this really being the Son of God and then I was really afraid. What would this God of the Jews do to US if we had truly killed his Son?

As I fled from that hilltop I saw a small group of women standing off to one side. They just stood there crying and staring at everything that had happened. Even when the hill was bare they still kept a vigil. What great love they must have had for him – to stay when everyone else had fled.

Sing “Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?”

Story #7 – The Tomb

Matthew 27:57-66

(One of the women, watching)

I was there, watching. We had never stopped watching. All day the group of us stood there and watched our beloved Jesus die. Watched and wept. Then after he was dead the soldiers took his body off of the cross and gave it to a man named Joseph. HE wrapped the body up and had his servants help him carry Jesus to a tomb in the rock. They laid our friend and teacher to rest and put a large rock in front of the grave. And still we watched. We didn't talk to each other. Who had any idea what to say? We just sat there. Then, while we watched and wept, one of the priests came with a group of soldiers. We heard the instructions: “Stand here and make sure no-one steals his body!” We were stunned, why would someone steal a body? Then the soldiers make the tomb as tightly sealed as they could. And still we watched and wept.

Eventually the day grew late and we had to leave to celebrate the Sabbath. (As if we wanted to celebrate anything. But Sabbath comes no matter what else happens, life keeps going.) Mary promised all of us that she would come back after Sabbath. She would bring spices and ensure that Jesus, who we loved, was properly taken care of. And so we left.